



NEWS RELEASE

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PARTNERS FOR WILDLIFE PROGRAM TAKES ECOLOGICAL HONORS

An innovative program that links private landowners who want to restore wildlife habitat on their lands with expertise and funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has received the Society for Ecological Restoration's Service Award for 1996.

Almost 14,000 non-Federal landowners have worked with the Service's Partners for Wildlife program to restore a broad range of wildlife habitats since it began in 1987. The society grants its Service Award to acknowledge individuals and organizations that have dedicated their time and skills to advance ecological restoration. The award was presented at the society's annual conference at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

"Partners for Wildlife is a win-win approach to habitat conservation for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private landowners," John Rogers, the agency's acting director, said. "Participants in this voluntary program receive financial backing for restoration on their lands that they couldn't afford on their own. They also receive technical assistance that can include design consultations, advice on soil and water quality improvement, and grazing management."

Partners for Wildlife coordinators in each state dedicate their skills to the private restoration projects. Restoration sites must be maintained for a minimum of 10 years. During that period, project participants can continue using their land and receiving the economic benefits from their habitat restoration efforts.

"Not surprisingly, Partners for Wildlife is one of our most popular programs," Rogers said. "We have many more people interested in working with the Service than we have funds to provide."

According to Rogers, program priorities emphasize projects that will protect habitat for species that are or may be placed on the Federal endangered species list. They also target habitat for migratory birds and anadromous fish, including salmon.

"By protecting the habitat of plants and animals before it is too late, we hope to prevent the need to list many species as endangered or threatened," Rogers said. "The partnership program

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is just one of many innovative approaches the Fish and Wildlife Service is using to make the Endangered Species Act work better. Last year, 85 percent of the partnership projects we set up in the western United States improved habitat for listed or candidate species."

Since its inception, Partners for Wildlife has provided funding to restore 310,000 acres of wetlands, including northeastern bogs, southeastern bottomland hardwoods, and southwestern cienegas; 40,000 acres of prairie grassland; and 600 miles of streamside and 50 miles of instream wildlife habitat.

"Opportunities for creative partnerships are as diverse as the different habitats we've restored," said Steve Forsythe, chief of the Service's Division of Habitat Conservation. "Restoration techniques include everything from letting Mother Nature do all the work to complex stream restoration projects that involve the latest bioengineering techniques."

Partnership projects are often the result of cooperative efforts with other Federal, state, and local government agencies as well as private organizations, schools, and businesses. These groups often provide additional financial and technical resources toward restoration. "Frequently community groups, including conservation districts, Scout troops, students, and service organizations, help provide labor. This cooperative element helps teach people about the importance of restoring fish and wildlife habitat. What's more, participating is often just plain fun," Forsythe said.

For additional information about the Partners for Wildlife program, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Habitat Conservation, Branch of Habitat Restoration, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 2161, Arlington, VA 22203.